

Jeane Kirkpatrick

If They Ousted Gorbachev

Suppose Mikhail Gorbachev were brought down and replaced by Yegor Ligachev or some such man with the active backing of a KGB-military coalition. How many of Gorbachev's sweeping reforms could survive? For how long? And how many are irreversible?

Could a successor again close borders and restore a "dictatorship of the proletariat" in Eastern Europe? Could he send Czechoslovakia's Vaclav Havel back to jail and Lech Walesa back to the shipyards? Could he junk the new Hungarian constitution, close the Brandenburg Gate, dig up Imre Nagy's body and rebury it? Could he make Hungary and Poland once again "peoples' republics"?

Not everything is reversible. Janos Kadar and Nicolae Ceausescu are dead. Erich Honecker is mortally ill with kidney cancer. But stand-ins could be found with the will to clamp down, and the needed skills at repression to do the job.

The successor repressers would need to understand that an authentic, peaceful revolution had been underway for several years—that that revolution had already dramatically changed the vocabulary and composition of the ruling elite of the Communist world. An effective restoration would return to power a disciplined and ruthless Leninist elite, one not inhibited in the use of force, one that would govern without embarrassment in the name of the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

Imagine the arrival in power of such a tyrant. What would he do to restore totalitarian rule in the Soviet Union? It might go like this:

He quickly dismisses the new Congress of People's Deputies and Supreme Soviet and appoints a new Politburo, new editors at Pravda and Izvestia and other leading Soviet journals, and new directors for state radio and television.

He ruthlessly represses dissident and nationalist journals, cancels the publication of Solzhenitsyn and terminates the Soviet tour of Mstislav Rostropovich and Washington's National Symphony. He outlaws factions, arrests leaders and editors who resist. The party issues a long proclamation on doctrine that rejects critics and criticism and reminds the faithful that class conflict is inevitable and that the ultimate contest between capitalist and socialist states is unavoidable. The proclamation denounces revisionism and revisionist doctrines concerning the role of the party, sternly rejects bourgeois constraints on the party and reasserts its privileged and exclusive historical position.

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cal position.
This government arrests nationalist leaders as "counterrevolutionary agitators," restores censorship, jams foreign broadcasts and strictly controls the importation and circulation of foreign publications. It reestablishes "proper" curricula at universities, bans the teaching of Hebrew and other religious practices and revokes visas for refuseniks.

It cancels joint economic ventures, confiscates Estee Lauder's Moscow store, outlaws cooperatives and arrests any "profiteers" who had managed to accumulate gain. It formally expunges from the vocabularies of Marxism-Leninism the words "glasnost" and "perestroika" and informs the Communist parties of the world that these "unwords" should never be mentioned again.

At the request of the new leader, and under the personal attention of Fidel Castro, Cuba's representative to the U.N. Human Rights Commission—who also serves as its vice president—files complaints against the "excesses" and "abuses" of the previous government.

A new International Commission on Peace and Justice is established with the direct participation of Castro, Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, North Korea's Kim Il Sung, Ethiopia's Mengistu and Afghanistan's Najibullah. Its purpose is to intensify the global campaign against imperialism and find new ways to advance "peace through struggle."

To make amends, new announcements are issued on the grand monuments to be constructed to the fallen martyrs purged in the Gorbachev era—Ceausescu and Honecker are to be subjects of the largest. Leonid Brezhnev's bigger-than-life statue is restored to what is again called Brezhnev Square.

The new leader is helped in his effort to restore "order" in Eastern Europe by the fact that 700,000 Soviet troops are still in Eastern Europe as he takes charge. They move to arrest the leadership of the "revisionist counterrevolutionary governments" and restore reliable leadership recruited from the third or fourth echelons of the national secret police—personal protégés of Ceausescu, Honecker and other reliable Bolsheviks. It does not take this new leadership long to restore the gun towers and guard dogs along the borders. The wall is mended overnight.

Western governments complain in the beginning. But almost everyone adapts. For some governments, there is a certain relief in having the question of German reunification retire from the European agenda and seeing the difficult issue of Eastern European membership in the European Community disappear.

NATO finds a lot to do in the new crisis, practicing for the thousandth time a coordinated response to a possible Soviet attack on Western Europe. American and Western European governments request large supplementary defense appropriations. Cuts in the SDI budget are restored. All this is needed because the Soviet Union's own military expenditures have quickly increased to a full 35 percent of its annual gross national product.

Everything, in sum, is back to normal—and a little more.

I don't think it will happen. But the fact that it could makes it enormously urgent to consolidate the changes and render them irreversible. Now.